

HOW CAN WE HELP AT SCHOOL? KS2 Higher Level Language Skills



What are Higher Level Language Skills?

Higher level language refers to skills that go beyond basic language skills like making sentences and using grammar. Many of these skills are not fully developed prior to age 8. It is therefore not unusual for children to have difficulties with these skills before this age.

We use higher level language skills to:

- Sequence information / ideas / events
- Provide explanations
- Make predictions
- Consider cause and effect
- Identify and solve problems
- Verbally reason and draw conclusions from information
- Make assumptions from verbal / visual information, text or from social contexts (known as inference)
- Look at things from another person's perspective
- Recognise as well as understand non-literal language / abstract language like idioms, ambiguous language, sarcasm and humour.

These skills are used throughout the day to:

- support overall literacy and to understand academic tasks at school (e.g. making inferences about text being read in a lesson)
- interact with others and our environment (e.g. predicting what others may do or infer information about our environment so we can adjust our actions accordingly)

Ideas to Support the Development of Inference Skills

- Talk about what inference means i.e. we find clues in the picture, text or environment and combine them with our own background knowledge to make an assumption about what is happening or what just happened
- Depending on the age and ability of the child/young person, you may need to consider initially using pictures that clearly show an event, followed by pictures and text like a comic strip, different types of text as well as social scenarios.
- Encourage the child/young person to think about what they can see and what they have been told. Model identifying and talking about clues in the picture / text or social situation.

- Ask questions to link these clues to the child's background knowledge of the situation. Model these thinking skills, (e.g. "when do we use an umbrella?" "I can see that the boy grabbed an umbrella, I can guess that it must be raining outside"). You can ask questions to help the child to infer the location of an event / weather / emotions of characters etc.
- You can also use visualisation to encourage the child to visualise a time that links to their own personal experiences or background knowledge (e.g. "remember the time we were soaked in the rain")

Be aware that if the child / young person has difficulties identifying and understanding emotions, they will find it very difficult to infer them.

Ideas to Support the Understanding and Use of Non-Literal Language Skills

- Teach about ambiguous words (i.e. words that sound the same but have different meanings, e.g. flour and flower.) When jokes are shared, you can explain the double meanings of the words used in jokes. Practise telling jokes thinking about your tone of voice and facial expressions. Build a bank of jokes. You could have a joke of the day/week.
- Talk about what sarcasm means. When sarcasm is used, discuss and draw the child/young person's attention to what has been said (words used) and why this does not match the intended meaning. Talk about how body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, rate of voice was used. You could role play the same expression changing these non-verbal clues to demonstrate different intentions.
- Explain idioms when these are used in conversations. Develop understanding of common and less familiar idioms e.g. "I'm all tied up now". Give possible meanings and discuss each option -
 - I'm very busy now (correct meaning)
 - I'm tied up with something like rope (literal meaning)

Idioms can be written down in a book. You could have an idiom of the week and try to use the idiom in different situations

Develop Problem Solving

When discussing a problem, demonstrate how to talk about the problem. You may need to help the child/young person to identify and sequence key information and then identify any possible options for a solution, (e.g. if someone pushes into the line, I could push them or I could ask them to go to the back of the line.)

Encourage the child/young person to predict what will happen next for each option. Discuss the consequences and talk about the best choice for that situation.

Relate the scenario to the child/young person's personal experiences and background knowledge by asking the child/young person if they have experienced or seen anything similar.

Use diagrams to help sequence information and break down problems as well as show consequences for various actions.

You could also practise scripts of what to say and rehearse possible situations that may arise.

General Strategies

- Think about your use of language. You may need to simplify the question, use direct language, break down instructions into smaller steps or give a choice of answer
- Talk through your own thinking skills out loud when making inferences, predictions or solving problems

If you require any further support/advice please contact via the following email

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In the subject line please state **FAO Virtual School SLCN Support** to ensure your message is actioned by the relevant team.